

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF MARINE SAFETY

In the Matter of:

"FIRE ON BOARD M/V COLUMBIA"

Docket No.:
DCA00MM030

Recorded Interview DALE H. PULJU.

On Board
Motor Vessel Columbia
Akue Bay, Juneau, Alaska

June 9, 2000

BEFORE:

NTSB INVESTIGATOR Anthony H. Murray
Operations Group Chairman

LIEUTENANT BARLETT, USCG, MSO, Juneau, Alaska

Captain Norm EDWARDS, Vessel Operations,
Alaska Marine Highway System

CAPTAIN BRERETON, Master, M/V COLUMBIA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

Mr. Anthony Murray: This is June 9, the year 2000, Friday. It's 3 p.m. approximately. We're on board the Motor Vessel Columbia in Juneau, Alaska.

And today we have with us, we are about to interview the Bosun of the Ship and his name is Dale H. Pulju. And that is spelled D-a-l-e is the first name. Middle initial H. Last name P-u-l-j-u.

Now the bosun is going to give us a narrative of the incident. But we're going to open up with a little background of the bosun and his training.

MR. PULJU: I've worked on the ferry system since 1973. I started in the Steward's Department, worked for a year in the Engine Room as a wiper. And moved in the Deck Department, started as an OSP, Watchman. And Ordinary Seaman and AB. And then, on the Columbia, I think for about ten, fifteen years as a Day AB, and then a Watch Standing AB.

And the last, I guess about two and a half years, as a Bosun. Went to fire-fighting school three years ago.

E X A M I N A T I O N

BY THE INTERVIEWER Mr. Anthony Murray:

Q So you're a fairly experienced bosun, I would say?

1 A Well, one of the newer bosuns but I've been
2 here a long time.

3 Q Okay.

4 A Been on this particular boat for ten, fifteen
5 years at least.

6 A PARTICIPANT, Captain Brereton: More than
7 ten years because you were here when I came. That was
8 12 years ago when I came as chief mate. No, thirteen
9 years ago.

10 MR. PULJU: It's ten or fifteen years.

11 And as far as the situation here, we left the
12 dock and we were getting ready for a fire and boat
13 drill at 12:30. And, prior to that, the alarm went
14 off.

15 And a partial message came through but it
16 said "This is not a drill." And then it started fading
17 in and out.

18 So I had my radio and I called the bridge.
19 They said it's not a drill, and it was an emergency or
20 a fire in the control room or the engine room.

21 So we mustered -- and the instructions were
22 to muster at the double-door locked room at 200 deck,
23 get our gear on and go down there.

24 So I told everybody that was there to get
25 their gear, told them where the fire was. And then I

1 took my gear that I was supposed to bring, which is
2 five gallons of foam, a VHF radio and a foam
3 applicator, and it's all on a little board, I carried
4 that down there.

5 The chief mate was there. We had one of the
6 engine room guys that already had a Scott air pack on.

7 I think he had already been in there. He was asking
8 for spare bottles.

9 I immediately turned around and told some
10 guys to go back and get spare bottles.

11 I went over to the gear locker on the car
12 deck and the spare bottles were gone; he had already
13 used those.

14 So we brought more spare bottles down and
15 then they wanted another suit for another engineer to
16 go in with him. So we -- the fire fighting team was
17 already there by then. They gave him another -- I
18 think they gave him -- at that time, I had to -- or did
19 I? Well, they gave him another -- they gave one of the
20 Scott air packs to one of the engineers.

21 And we were stringing hoses out on the car
22 deck and getting more air bottles brought down, spare
23 Scott air packs from the wheelhouse and -- all the
24 Scott air packs.

25 And now the time frame gets kind of -- after

1 this because I'm not sure exactly the order it went in.

2 But I had to go back and rig a ladder for the Anacapa
3 crew that was out and coming aboard.

4 I took I think it was Barb Green with me. We
5 went back -- or Barb Brown. We went back and rigged a
6 ladder. The Anacapa crew came aboard. We assisted
7 them to where the scene, where the assembly area was,
8 and turned them over to the chief mate.

9 And then we were instructed to go back.
10 There was more gear coming aboard back there. We went
11 back there and helped bring other gear aboard.

12 The Taku was giving us air bottles and Scott
13 air packs. We were bringing those aboard, shuttling
14 them up to where the assembly area was.

15 And by this time, I think Mark, the purser,
16 was pretty much handling the assembly of the Scott air
17 packs, keeping track of the used bottles, the new
18 bottles, the new Scott air packs that were there that
19 were good. We had one that the O-ring came out of.
20 And we had to get that separated out so that it
21 wouldn't get used or picked up.

22 And some place in there, I had to assist
23 Woody Watson and Pat, the engineer. They wanted to
24 open the escape hatch to the control room to vent it.

25 I assisted Woody back into put his mask on,

1 hooked him up to the Scott air pack and turned his air
2 on. We went over and opened the emergency escape hatch
3 for Pat and he stayed there. And I had to go back and
4 assist some more flooding the top of the deck with
5 water to cool it.

6 It wasn't very warm. I felt it, but it was
7 still warm so we were still flooding. I had to rig
8 another hose around on the starboard side in front of
9 the elevator to get over on those car lanes over there.

10 And then on the port side, or just around the corner
11 from the door there so we could get on lanes six and
12 seven and get water on there.

13 Came back. The smoke had come up. Pat Yosts
14 wanted Woody back to secure that hatch. Hooked Woody's
15 air back up. He went in and secured the hatch.

16 I think then the evacuation was started or
17 was getting underway. Actually, it started before that
18 but they had a problem, I think, with some older people
19 that were on the stairwell and that slowed it down.

20 And once that was done, then it started going
21 faster, going back to this after starboard tie-up
22 station to bring more gear aboard and more people
23 aboard that were coming aboard, assist with them.

24 Oh, no. Then, some place in there, I had to
25 go back aft on 100-deck and tie up the stern of the top

1 booth to us with a little rigging, rerigging, to get
2 the alignment right through the right chawks. Got that
3 lined up.

4 And I stayed back there in case something
5 went wrong. I rotated out with Barbara Green and she
6 was back there with me on the OSP.

7 So somebody was there at all times. And we
8 had somebody down on that after tie-up station all the
9 time assisting those people that were back there,
10 getting equipment on and off, people on and off. More
11 equipment than people.

12 I think we only brought a couple of people
13 aboard.

14 And one time when I was back there -- oh, we
15 had started the vent. They had started the evacuation
16 back on the starboard stern.

17 Some passengers started out at the stairwell
18 back there. I asked them where they were going. They
19 said they were sent down here. I knew different. I
20 knew that the evacuation was started up on the port
21 side forward.

22 I stopped them until I could get a steward
23 that came down the stairwell. I said, "Follow me."
24 We'll rather than back them all the way up the
25 stairwell, I told him to go up to the top of the

1 stairwell to stop anybody else and send them where they
2 were supposed to go, and take them there.

3 Send the rest of the people down here, I took
4 them around the stern. Up between lanes four and five
5 was a clear shot. I took them up there for the
6 evacuation, got them out of the way, off the car deck.

7 And let me see. I guess then they went back
8 up and stood by. We were going to let go of the Taku
9 and let go of the Taku. I went up on the bow, rigged
10 up for the Taku towing us.

11 We rigged up two lines, passed them to the
12 Taku. They hooked on, they towed us. And it was kind
13 of drizzly and I'd been wet. We all went, cleared the
14 fore deck, went inside by the purser's counter. And
15 then the Taku left, dropped the lines and missed the
16 communication on the line letting go.

17 I saw the Taku go by and then I heard the
18 communication that the Taku had left, so I got the deck
19 crew out there with over lines and they said the tug
20 was two miles off.

21 Looked over there, saw the tug. Got ready.
22 The tug passed us their lines, their towing bridle. We
23 rigged it up on the bow; they towed us.

24 And that was it, I guess, basically, that I
25 can remember.

1 Q All right, thank you very much, Bosun.

2 A I might have missed something in there. I
3 was back and forth by that assembly area constantly,
4 between there the stern, the stern up here and the bow
5 and around.

6 Q You did very well. You gave a very good
7 narrative of the incident.

8 And your muster duty station, you just
9 followed what your duties were right here as listed on
10 the muster list? The station bill.

11 Okay, if there was anything else that you
12 could want to offer that you're thinking back on the
13 incident that you thought could have been done
14 different, or want to have any good ideas to improve if
15 this incident would happen again?

16 A Well, I've thought about it a lot. We had
17 good communications. One of the things that they had
18 changed recently was that, instead of all being on one
19 frequency, it would have gone to two frequencies -- the
20 emergency crew on one frequency, the rest of the people
21 on another frequency.

22 I thought that worked real good because I
23 wasn't getting involved with the clearing of the ship.

24 All I had involved with was getting the fire-fighting
25 equipment, getting all that equipment to the scene and

1 coordinating with the chief mate.

2 And the other people that were there -- I
3 thought that was one of the best changes I've seen
4 lately.

5 Other than that, I don't...

6 Q Okay.

7 A We had good communications. The only time I
8 ever missed any communications that I know of was when
9 the Taku left us.

10 THE INTERVIEWER: Thank you, Bosun. I don't
11 have any further questions, and I'll turn the
12 questioning over to the Lieutenant. And then, if the
13 Captain or Mr. Edwards has any questions, we'll go
14 around the table.

15 BY LIEUTENANT BARLETT:

16 Q Why was it that you missed that one call?

17 A Well, that I'm not sure. I was inside the
18 purser's counter. And sometimes the communication
19 doesn't penetrate different parts of the ship --
20 different. And my battery might have been low, too.

21 Q VHF this was?

22 A VHF, right.

23 Q Are there repeaters throughout the vessel, do
24 you know?

25 A Not that I know of.

1 PARTICIPANTS: No.

2 CAPTAIN BRERETON: Maybe I could clear that up
3 being's -- I'm not testifying right now.

4 But, the Taku had a medivac they needed to
5 get urgently moving on. And so I had a helmsman up
6 there. I told the Taku to slow down, you break right,
7 break left and just let us go. They let us go from up
8 there.

9 I knew we wouldn't be able to retrieve those
10 lines in the water for a little while. So I didn't
11 call down below for the guys to do it until the ship's
12 way had slowed down.

13 There wasn't a call.

14 LIEUTENANT BARLETT: So he didn't miss
15 anything?

16 CAPTAIN BRERETON: There wasn't a call, no.
17 No.

18 LIEUTENANT BARLETT: That's great feedback,
19 that you didn't miss anything, that your coms gear
20 worked great.

21 And throughout this whole thing, you said
22 your coms gear was good.

23 MR. PULJU: Right.

24 BY LIEUTENANT BARLETT:

25 Q So the evacuation then other than moving that

1 one group of people that were misdirected, you were
2 essentially not involved in that?

3 A Right. Oh, I initially, when they started to
4 get that up, that was the second mate, Jeff. I was
5 over there and opened the car door for them. I missed
6 that part. I was over there. I think I opened the car
7 door for them.

8 But I was there when -- and then he took over
9 and I left and then he brought and rigged everything
10 over there. I didn't have anything to do with that
11 part.

12 Q What door was it that you opened?

13 A The port side door. Port side door.

14 Q Do you know if the starboard door was open?

15 A No, I don't. I can't remember if it was. I
16 didn't open it.

17 We did do venting. And by venting, we opened
18 these -- at different times, we opened the stern tie-up
19 station doors. This door right here that comes up out
20 of the car deck, the hatch on the bow which comes down
21 through the shop, opened the shop door and opened the
22 door going out on to the foredeck out there to vent
23 smoke off the car deck.

24 And we did that when I was told to do it, and
25 I sent people around to do that. But that was -- we

1 did that twice, once when we vented the control room.
2 And then we shut those ones back aft. And then we
3 vented again later after they shut that hatch down into
4 the control room to vent the smoke out.

5 Q And, then after you did that, you closed them
6 all up again?

7 A Well, the first time we closed them up again
8 when the smoke came up. Then we closed them up again
9 because we didn't want venting. They were instructed
10 to close them.

11 And then, after a while, after that was
12 closed, then we vented the car deck again. But, didn't
13 open that escape hatch down in there.

14 LIEUTENANT BARTLETT: Thank you.

15 BY MR. EDWARDS:

16 Q Bosun, there's a couple of instants where
17 people came to the top of the ladder. They seemed to
18 be misguided or they were wandering.

19 Did they appear to be lost?

20 A No. At the top of the ladder --

21 Q When you had some of the passengers that
22 were--

23 A Right. The ones that I were involved with
24 came down the starboard stairwell aft. And I stopped
25 them. There was a steward there. I told him to go

1 back up the ladder, stop the people at the top of the
2 stairs and send them where they belonged, because he
3 knew where they belonged.

4 Send the rest down the stairwell to me. And
5 I had another person that was with me. I told him to
6 wait here and we directed a chain of them around the
7 stern back here and out.

8 And the steward redirected everybody to where
9 they were supposed to go.

10 Q How many people?

11 A Probably, ten or fifteen that came down the
12 stairwell. Then we took them around the stern.

13 Q At that time, were they trying to go to an
14 abandon ship location? Were they trying to get out on
15 deck?

16 A No. They were directed -- I asked the one at
17 the front there and he said he was directed to go down
18 to evacuate off the ship.

19 I said, well, it -- I didn't tell him
20 anything. I just said, "Okay, wait right here. I'll
21 direct you around here."

22 Q So they were coming -- they weren't confused.
23 They were coming to the car deck?

24 A Right, they were on their way to the car deck
25 to evacuate. They had been sent down. They weren't on

1 the right stairwell down.

2 Q So you established a stairwell guide
3 redirect?

4 A Right. There was a steward there and he took
5 care of that. We directed him around. And I'd been
6 back and forth after that and nobody else came down
7 that stairwell while I was back and forth and all over.

8 I just did what I was told.

9 Q It went very smooth. All indications that we
10 have is it was a smooth job.

11 A I was happy there was no more damage than
12 what damage was done, and it was contained.

13 MR. ANTHONY MURRAY: Okay, Bosun. Well,
14 thank you very much. This completes our interview for
15 the Bosun.

16 (INTERVIEW CONCLUDED.)

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18

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